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Smart

A Play
by
Robert Fieldsteel

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

- RAYMOND CLAY Of Winslow, Vermont. Age 19 during interviews, age 16 & 17 in flashback. A prisoner, formerly a high-school student.
- STAN FERGUSON Of Winslow, Vermont. Age 18 during deposition, age 16 & 17 in flashback. A prisoner, formerly a high-school student.
- CATHY SPRINGER A senior at Dorchester College, Helmsted, New Hampshire. Age 21. Also plays MOLLY CASEY.
- DOUG FISK A senior at Dorchester College, Helmsted, New Hampshire. Age 21.
- KAREN GUYON Assistant Attorney General of the State of New Hampshire. 40's. Also plays SARAH ZORN, VERMONT WOMAN, and RAYMOND'S MOTHER.
- MATT MOELLER Police Sergeant, State of New Hampshire. 50's. Also plays GREGORY ZORN, VERMONT MAN, and "SOG KNIVES" MAN.

SETTING

Smart takes place in three major playing areas:

Stage Center is RAYMOND CLAY'S area. This includes two grey, metal chairs and a table in a small, private VISITING ROOM in the Northern New Hampshire Correctional Facility.

Stage Right is DOUG FISK and CATHY SPRINGER'S DORM ROOM at Dorchester College. It contains a grey, metal double-decker bunk bed, a college-issue desk, and a rolling desk chair.

Stage Left is a SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM in the Barston County, New Hampshire Sheriff's Office. This is where STAN FERGUSON gives his deposition to KAREN GUYON and MATT MOELLER.

As Smart flows from one time and setting to another, and characters from different times/settings co-exist onstage, a generally open, flexible space is preferred. Characters may enter areas other than "their own" -- the three areas noted above are merely a starting point and a place to return to; they may also overlap liberally (esp. in smaller theatres). Flashbacks, the Zorn home, etc. are generally conceived as taking place center stage, but they may move into other areas. Likewise, characters may play scenes as if they're next to each other, yet actually be in separate areas. Again, the three separate areas are a convention that is established both for the purpose of clarity and as a rule to be broken.

ACT I

RAYMOND CLAY, 19, dressed in a bright orange prison jumpsuit, sits in a grey metal chair and addresses the audience.

RAYMOND

Raymond Clay doesn't care what other people think. He knows his own mind. He knows you want to see remorse. But Raymond Clay knows he just did something incredibly stupid. And that's not something you get all choked up about, y'know? I mean, when you think about your own stupidity, do you get all blubbery? I don't think so. They had these shrinks, these shrinks all wanted to see if I could get in touch with my emotion. I said, "I've got lots of emotion. I just don't have the emotion you want."

LIGHTS UP on Dormitory Room: CATHY SPRINGER, 21. She's sitting on the top bunk of a metal-framed bunk bed. Sharing her small dorm room is her boyfriend, DOUG FISK, also 21. DOUG sits in dim light at a standard issue college desk.

CATHY

Before I break up with a boy, I always ask him if he believes in God and, inevitably, his answer makes breaking up a hell of a lot easier. The answer's always pretty much the same, something along the lines of:

DOUG

Well, I don't really believe in "God" as, y'know, a singular entity, like: "GOD". But I do feel that there is a kind of guiding presence out there, y'know, something bigger than us. I guess I'm kind of agnostic.

CATHY

And then I'd say something like: "Oh Doug, that's so Volvo-Unitarian, what do you *really* think about God?" Doug's response was a little different than the usual. He said:

DOUG

Wait: don't tell me you *disapprove* of my concept of God. If your concept of God was so much better, you'd be smart enough not to *diss* my concept of God. Didn't your mother teach you anything?

CATHY

And I thought, "Okay. That's fair. Reprieve granted." See, I was desperately trying to convince myself that I was making my own choices. I was kind of a moron.

RAYMOND

I'll tell you what's wrong with this prison. Nobody here knows how to eat right.

(MORE)

RAYMOND(cont'd)

I'd kill for some vegetables that aren't stewed to death. A fresh salad with raws - broccoli, squash, red pepper, something that's still got some fiber. I say, 'How about some fresh vegetables?', they say, 'Perishables are a bitch in here, man. Perishables go bad in here, they want the processed shit anyway,' I say, 'You got *that* right.' It was the same thing in High School, me and Stan, they'd say to us, You don't eat from the vending machines, you think that makes you better than everybody?, I'd say, "Uh-huh."

(beat)

Kids in the middle of dairy country eating Kraft Go-Packs for lunch. Dayglo orange cheese-food with the little red plastic knife. People up from New Jersey for foliage season, chugging Snapple, think it's a health drink. That's why Stan and I, we wanted out. Australia. Unspoiled.

LIGHTS UP, bright, on a modest conference room. Present are SGT. MATT MOELLER, 50'S, in a New Hampshire State Police uniform, New Hampshire Assistant Attorney General KAREN GUYON, mid 30's, in simple business attire, and STAN FERGUSON, 18, in a bright orange prison jumpsuit. MATT turns on a tape recorder and speaks into it.

MATT MOELLER

Today's date is December 18th, 2001. Time according to my watch is 28 minutes past 10 a.m. The speaker is Sergeant Matt Moeller of the New Hampshire State Police Major Crime Unit, I'm at the Barston County Sheriff's office in a conference room. At this time, I am going to turn this conversation over to New Hampshire State Attorney General Karen Guyon.

KAREN GUYON

Could you please tell us what your name is?

STAN

Stan Ferguson. Stanley.

KAREN GUYON

And, Stan -- do you prefer Stan?

STAN

Mmm.

KAREN GUYON

Your family resides at 10 Barre [pronounced "Bar"] Lane, Winslow, Vermont?

STAN

Barre. [pronounced "Barry"]

KAREN GUYON
Barre [pronounced "Barry"] Lane?

STAN
Yes.

KAREN GUYON
Your family resides at 10 Barre ["Barry"] Lane, Winslow,
Vermont?

STAN
Yeah. Should we wind the tape back?

KAREN GUYON
Excuse me?

STAN
To erase the mistake?

MATT MOELLER
We can't do that. We can't doctor a deposition, even if it's
a minor error. We can state that we're stopping the tape and
starting the tape. But once it's on the tape, it stays.

STAN
Mm hm.

KAREN GUYON
Do you have any problem with us taping this interview?

STAN
Oh, I wasn't objecting or anything, I just was wondering.

KAREN GUYON
Actually, that was the next question. It wasn't prompted by
anything you said.

STAN
Oh. No, no problem.

KAREN GUYON
With us taping the interview.

STAN
Yeah. Yes.

KAREN GUYON
You've pleaded guilty to Second Degree Murder in connection
with the death of Sarah Zorn.

STAN
Yes.

KAREN GUYON

And you've entered a plea agreement with the State of New Hampshire?

STAN

Yeah.

KAREN GUYON

In terms of this interview today, all we want you to do is to tell the truth. Do you understand this?

STAN

Yes. Um, with the plea agreement, it's my understanding that, like, if I answer all your questions, I'll get 25 to Life instead of Life?

KAREN GUYON

That's correct.

STAN

And I could get out in as little as 18 years?

KAREN GUYON

Under the present system, 18 years would be possible with exemplary conduct.

STAN

I intend to be exemplary.

SHIFT TO CATHY

CATHY

When they found out it was two Vermont boys who murdered the professors, I talked to my parents and my mother said, "Thank god it wasn't someone from the college." That was the first thing she said. And it sort of chilled my blood.

(slowly:)

"Thank god it wasn't someone from the college."

(beat)

It pretty much confirmed my most cynical opinion of what was on people's minds. It really was an "Us vs. Them" thing. 'People like us don't get murdered, so I sure as hell hope it wasn't one of us who did the murdering. Because that could seriously compromise the infrastructure of our image.' If you think it's impossible for an image to have an infrastructure, you haven't gone through Deerhurst College. I mean, the national, no, the *international* media called it 'The Deerhurst Murders'. The popular view of the victims was of two people sucking in the ivy-scented rarified atmosphere with their final gasps.

(MORE)

CATHY(cont'd)

Gregory and Sarah Zorn were stabbed, like, forty-seven times with Navy Seal knives and I bet you they didn't give a rat's ass if they were being stabbed by somebody from the college or not. Frankly, when people are stabbed forty-seven times with Navy Seal knives, I prefer to see them as just fellow members of the human race, fuck the pedigree. Not a popular sentiment among the Deerhursteroids.

(pause)

Okay, I can be a little judgmental. But if it's any compensation, I *am* judgmental of my being judgmental. So I think it's healthy when I'm reminded that God is a few steps ahead of me. I see God as a sixty year old woman who's played out all her obligations and who spends her days drinking and smoking and figuring out new and amusing ways to play with her wisdom. When times are tough for me, I like to think it's just because of some smart old broad with a sick sense of humor who's fucking with me and who's damned well earned the right to do so. I find that to be a comforting theology. So when it came to me ... and the Deerhurst Murders ... all I could think was, "Okay -- God is really laughing her ass off over this one." Because, I mean it, I just couldn't stand the whole Deerhurst Murder story, the whole way people responded to that story, and I stayed so far away from that story, I mean, that story was about as alluring to me as a Pep Rally, and just when it seemed as if that story had died down, been tucked away, and kissed goodnight, I got Raymond Clay in my life with a vengeance . He was locked in a prison cell forty miles away, but he might as well have been living in our dorm room.

LIGHTS UP on the rest of Cathy and Doug's dorm room. DOUG sits in his rolling desk chair and reads aloud from a sheet of paper. During the following, CATHY climbs down from her top bunk, takes a bottle of vodka and tray of ice from a mini-fridge, and goes through the process of mixing a Black Russian.

DOUG

(reading aloud)

"Northern New Hampshire Correctional Facility, Inmate Visitation Rules and Procedures. One: Visits will be scheduled by the visitor one week in advance by telephone.

CATHY

Black Russian?

DOUG

No thanks.

(reading)

"Two:" (Here we go.) "Visitors may only bring handkerchiefs into the facility visiting area.

(MORE)

DOUG(cont'd)

All other items, including foodstuff, baby bottles and diaper bags," etc., etc., "must be left in the lockers provided."
 (to Cathy)

That's the one that Bruce Newman called--

CATHY

Right, yeah.

DOUG

So I can--

CATHY

Right.

DOUG

(continues reading)

"The inmate may briefly embrace and kiss his visitor at the beginning and end of the visit."

CATHY

That's really sad.

DOUG

"An inmate may refuse a visit from a visitor at any time. Visitors who are intoxicated or 'acting out' will not be permitted to visit with an inmate." Does 'acting out' sound like prison jargon to you? "Visitors are not permitted to leave the visiting room during a --

CATHY

Okay, that's, -- Why don't you highlight the juicy passages and I'll read it to myself later?

DOUG

Wait, wait, one more, this one's--

CATHY

Don't take this personally, but you have this kind of throbbing monotone when you read that makes me never want to have sex with you again.

DOUG

(deadpan)

That's not very supportive.

CATHY

I know, tomorrow's a big day for you, but you sound like my grandfather reading the back of a cereal box. My grandfather, he and my grandmother drive hundreds of miles to see us and then he sits there and reads every bit of text on the cereal boxes out loud.

DOUG

Why?

CATHY

I think it's something to do with being terrified of having a real conversation.

DOUG

Are you saying I should be sitting here baring my soul on how scared shitless I am about tomorrow?

CATHY

(Crossing and sitting on his lap, straddling him)

No. Liberal humanism has created too much of a reward system for emotional self-disclosure. It's become a form of fascism.

A LOUD, ECHOING BUZZER interrupts the scene. SOUNDS of METAL PRISON DOORS opening and shutting. LIGHTS FADE on dorm room.

LIGHTS UP on RAYMOND, sitting at a prison visiting room table as DOUG, carrying a yellow legal pad and pencil, crosses into the visiting room area. RAYMOND rises, THEY hold their hands up to an unseen guard to show that they're not holding anything. Then THEY shake hands.

RAYMOND

You look the same.

DOUG

Yeah, pretty much so, I guess. You look different.

RAYMOND

I bet.

Awkward pause for a moment. THEY sit. RAYMOND notices DOUG's pad and pen.

RAYMOND (cont'd)

They let you bring those in?

DOUG

(re: pad/pen)

These?

RAYMOND

Yeah.

DOUG

I got clearance.

RAYMOND

How'd you wrangle that?

DOUG

Well, they make an exception for doctors or lawyers--

RAYMOND

Yeah, I know.

DOUG

--so they can take notes. And my senior thesis advisor, Bruce Newman, a former student of his -- recent grad, relatively -- Lucas something -- I can't believe I can't remember his name -- any way, he works for the Department of Corrections --

RAYMOND

A Deerhurst grad?

DOUG

Well, some alums, y'know, they like to stay in the area.

RAYMOND

Uh-huh.

DOUG

Anyway, Bruce made the argument that what we're doing is essentially for a professional purpose, I mean, it's not literally doctoring or lawyering but it's, y'know, a working relationship and ... anyway, make a long story short, Bruce called this Lucas guy and Lucas called somebody else and here I am with a pen and a yellow pad.

RAYMOND

Yeah, well, cool, that makes sense.

DOUG

Right. So, anyway--

RAYMOND

Actually, it doesn't.

DOUG

Hm?

RAYMOND

It doesn't make sense.

DOUG

How so?

RAYMOND

Well, see, the doctor and the lawyer, that's for me. It's my understanding that a doctor or a lawyer can bring papers and
(MORE)

RAYMOND(cont'd)
 pens and stuff in because I can't be denied my rights to legal counsel or medical treatment. So those ... professionals ... need to write stuff down in order that I may benefit from the services that my basic rights, such as they are, provide to me. So, that's, y'know, different than if, say, some guy came in trying to sell me time shares on Lake Winnepesaukee, even though that is also, in essence and in fact, a professional or working relationship. But I don't get what benefit it is to me whether you have a yellow legal pad or not.

DOUG

Well, if you're telling me things, I think it's to your benefit that I write them down so that I can remember them correctly.

RAYMOND

Your notes aren't what I say.

DOUG

True, not exactly, but it'll make for a better paper if I can take notes.

RAYMOND

Uh, look, I know I'm risking being argumentative here --

DOUG

That's fine.

RAYMOND

No, really, I mean, I know there's nothing worse than an ungracious host -- But I just want to get where we're coming from kind of clear here --

DOUG

Absolutely.

RAYMOND

So why would it be to my benefit if Doug Fisk's senior sociology thesis is better or worse?

Beat.

DOUG

Because Doug Fisk's experience of Raymond Clay is that Raymond Clay likes to be associated with quality.

Pause.

RAYMOND

So after you write this thesis ... then what?

DOUG
Well, it goes to my advisor and--

RAYMOND
No, I mean, *you*, what do *you* do?

DOUG
With the thesis?

RAYMOND
No: *you*.

DOUG
Oh, well, hopefully and presumably, I graduate.

RAYMOND
And then?

DOUG
What.

RAYMOND
Then what do you do?

DOUG
Well, I've definitely got some ideas but ... I'm not really sure.

RAYMOND
Clock's ticking.

DOUG
Yeah.
(Pulling out a sheet of
prepared questions)
There's a lot I wanted to get through

RAYMOND
I mean *you*. Til graduation.

DOUG
Oh. Yeah. Yeah, clock's definitely ticking.

RAYMOND
I don't envy you.

DOUG
Yeah, it's a little nervous-making.
(pause. Sincerely:)
Why did you agree to see me?

RAYMOND
Is that the first question on the sheet?

DOUG

It is, actually.

RAYMOND

Lemme see.

DOUG holds the paper up, in front of his face,
so that RAYMOND can read it.

RAYMOND (cont'd)

(reading)

No shit. Wait - you pencilled something in there, what's that say?

DOUG

Yeah, my handwriting stinks.

(reading from paper:)

"... when you've refused to talk to anyone in the press."
Yeah, that was sort of optional, I decided to bring that up
later. Like, in the moment. But as long as we're here ...

RAYMOND

Press is press. Mass consumption, they've got the story all
planned out before they show up, so what do they need *me* for?

DOUG

So why talk to me?

RAYMOND

Well, first off, nobody's gonna read your paper. Aaand, ya'
really wanta' know, Doug ... I think you "got" me and Stan.
The other teaching assistants, it was all about them being
hot shit, especially the ones from Deerhurst. But you weren't
like the other teaching assistants. I could see you just
taking us in, me and Stan. You got us. You got the joke.

DOUG

How could you tell?

RAYMOND

I was watching you, I could tell.

(beat)

So what happened?

DOUG

What.

RAYMOND

To your sense of humor?

DOUG

Well, to tell you the truth, Raymond, this place, and you
here, it doesn't exactly put me in a ha-ha mood. I mean, I

(MORE)

DOUG(cont'd)
 still see you as that kid in the classroom, you and Stan doing those really ... creative oral reports and everything and ...y' know, it sounds corny but there's this teacher/mentor/whatever part of me that feels, 'There's no such thing as a bad boy,' I mean, that's why *I'm* here today, so ... it's tough to see you here no matter what you ... no matter what.

Beat.

RAYMOND
 I loved killing them. I loved pulling the knife through his guts like he was a big fish. It was my 'peak experience'.
 (beat. small smile)
 Next question.

LIGHT SHIFT. DOUG crosses to his and Cathy's dorm room. As usual, SHE's simultaneously studying and drinking.

DOUG
 He's not a nice boy.

CATHY
 And this is surprising you?

DOUG
 Well, I didn't think he'd be *directly* fucking with me.

CATHY
 Uh, I think he's got a couple of "unprocessed anger issues" here. I mean, they were stabbed like forty-seven times. He did everything but eat their intestines and drink their blood.

DOUG
 Fine, but what's he got against *me*?

CATHY
 What'd he have against the Zorns? They were total strangers, he was, what, gonna kill them for their PIN numbers so he and his little friend could go to Australia?

DOUG
 One of the stupidest plans of all time.

CATHY
 So how was he fucking with you?

DOUG
 Oh, I don't know. Within five minutes or something he's zeroing in on graduation. "Times running out," little comments like that.